The Moscow Times
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Shocking Video Prompts Mass Torture Crackdown in Russian Prisons

July 24, 2018



Vasily Kuzmichyonok / TASS

Russia's prison service has announced plans to launch a nationwide inspection of correctional facilities following public outrage over a leaked video of a prisoner being tortured.

Public officials in Yaroslavl have come under fire for failing to investigate a torture case dating back to 2017 before footage of the incident was published in the media last week. Seventeen prison guards have since been fired and six arrested on charges of abuse of power. In a separate case on Tuesday, investigators in the western city of Bryansk said they had detained a guard on suspicion of torturing an inmate to death.

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The Federal Penitentiary Service (FSIN) said Tuesday that it will set up inquiry boards in all of its regional branches to investigate the use of physical force by employees in the past year.

“If there is abuse of authority... the guilty persons will face strict disciplinary measures, including their possible dismissal,” FSIN said in an online statement.

Later on Tuesday, a spokeswoman for Russia’s Investigative Committee said the central branch of the agency will lead the probe into the alleged 2017 torture of inmate Yevgeny Makarov in Yaroslavl.

On Monday, Amnesty International’s director for Eastern Europe, Marie Struthers, warned that in the absence of a national mechanism for preventing torture, the investigation into the Yaroslavl case would “be an exception to the rule."

“We remain extremely concerned for the safety of Yevgeny Makarov and the thousands of others detained in Russian pre-trial detention centers, penal colonies and police stations where allegations of torture and other ill-treatment are rife and investigations are rare,” she added.

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